



GSMOL Californian Emergency Preparation Series: When Disaster Strikes

Joseph Krueger and Virginia Nicols--Marketing Machine

Part 1: How Prepared Is Your Mobile Home Community?

In the event of a major catastrophe, such as an earthquake or other major disaster, mobile home parks as well as other residential neighborhoods won't be able to count on help from fire departments or emergency services. We may need to be self-sufficient for two or three days or even longer because public services, such as fire, police and rescue personnel and equipment may be occupied with higher priority missions (hospitals, civic centers, schools, police stations, retirement homes, etc.) or, may be physically prevented from responding to our emergencies in a normal time frame due to impassable roads or other obstructions.

The quality of park resident's response to the emergency will be the key to their survival and the degree of their success in minimizing injuries and damage to homes in the park.

Addressing the Danger Factor

Fires in a mobile home park can be especially dangerous. The highly-combustible nature of the mobile structures give our homes a typical burn time of less than ten minutes. Add this to the fact that neighboring homes are only feet away creates a situation that is especially dangerous for families with younger children as well as for elderly residents with limited mobility.

Some residents are in even more precarious situations if they have no earthquake stabilization, are disabled or on life support, etc. To the extent these people are unknown to others in the park, their situation places the community as a whole in greater jeopardy.

It is, therefore, in everybody's interest to know where attention needs to be focused — on a priority basis — in a life and property-threatening situation.

The traditional threats of natural disaster which can include flooding, landslides, fires, storms, and wind are compounded by the threat of urban disaster--breaking of gas lines, chemical spills, train wrecks. Today, we must also add the threat of peripheral damage from the new reality of terrorist attacks, including weapons of mass destruction. This makes the need to prepare the community to deal with emergency situations greater than ever before in history.

What are the critical elements of preparation for emergencies?

Much can and should be done to protect lives and property. The highest priority is education, like getting people to take responsibility for their own household's welfare. (See the Basic Emergency Response Checklist that accompanies this installment.)

The next priority is planning, organizing and training in community emergency response. Knowing how to respond and acting in a coordinated team environment will save countless lives and go a long way toward minimizing damage in just about any kind of emergency.

In communities where local police, fire and emergency management programs exist, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides training for citizens at little or no cost to participants. Typically an eight-week course (one evening a week), the Community Emergency Response Team training is one of the most valuable programs available to the general public. Graduates are certified by FEMA as trained first responders and citizens who render aid in an emergency are protected by the Good Samaritan Act against frivolous lawsuits.

Organizing the community and building an effective Contingency Plan becomes the final piece in the preparation program. And, while there are definitely risks that are specific to mobile home living, so too are there advantages that properly-motivated residents can use to tip the scales in their park's favor. (More on that next month.)

Since there is likely to be no time for training once an emergency arises, having a plan and a well-trained team to respond is the real key to survival. But, building a plan is not easy. It requires careful analysis of the situation and extra care to make it as simple as possible for people to follow.

Steps to take before you begin working on your plan.

1. Analyze the state of any current plan that may exist for the park or community.
2. Identify all official organizations with responsibility for any aspect of the park: park ownership, park management, local authorities, etc.
3. Collect educational materials for residents for protecting themselves and helping neighbors in emergency situations.
4. Identify potential threats for your specific location and rank them in order of severity and likelihood of occurrence.
5. Enlist support from park owners and management to meet their moral and legal obligations to members of the community in providing leadership and resources for your contingency plan.
6. Investigate ways park residents might obtain financial assistance in preparing for emergencies.

Then, more specifically... Provide appropriate checklists and guidelines for park residents that will help them prepare for at least 72 hours without outside assistance. This includes food, water, dealing with waste, etc. This should also include instructions for them to give to relatives and friends who might inquire about their well being in the event of a catastrophe.

Survey every home in the park to ascertain their vulnerability to various disaster scenarios and their occupants' ability to respond; and assign risk levels

and quadrants for response/assistance to each space number in the event of emergencies.

Establish teams of volunteers with some knowledge, experience, resources (tools? RVs?) or other capabilities that qualify them to take on responsibilities in the absence of official assistance or until official assistance can reach the park.

Set forth procedures for communicating and mobilizing resources to meet the challenges that might be faced in different emergencies. (Here is where an organized Emergency Response Team, their training, their discipline and use of even inexpensive FRS radios become a pivotal resource!)

Establish priorities for action to guide people responding to an emergency that will keep the most important objectives clearly in focus.

In next month's installment of this series, we'll discuss the planning in more detail and provide a sample survey to determine what needs a community has as well as the resources it can bring to bear on those needs.

About the authors...

Virginia Nicols and Joe Krueger, both certified graduates of the FEMA-sponsored C.E.R.T. program, are business consultants with experience in disaster recovery and contingency planning in the corporate environment. Mr. Krueger, a former counterintelligence agent with the US Army, has extensive experience in industrial security.

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Part 2: Building A Contingency Plan For Your Mobile Home Community

As we pointed out in the first article in this series, a major disaster that affects your community is likely to overwhelm police, fire and medical facilities for the first hours and days of the event. Our survival and our neighbors' survival may well depend on our own planning, preparation and training.

And, before you worry about "liability" for helping someone in an emergency, be aware that there is legislation on the books in California that protects you. It's called the Good Samaritan Law and provides major protection for citizens acting in good faith to help fellow citizens who are injured or in jeopardy.

Mobile Home Communities Have Special Needs

As our previous article pointed out, mobile home communities present special challenges in building a contingency plan. The age and nature of construction of the homes, their close proximity, the parks' layouts and the often-limited resources that residents have are among the typical concerns. Add to that the rural nature of some parks, old and inadequate water supply systems in some parks and close proximity to rail lines or other potential hazards and building a Contingency Plan becomes a complex undertaking.

Some Definite Advantages

But so too do we have advantages over conventional neighborhoods, such as: The closed community nature of most parks gives us a clearly-defined geographical focus. In family parks we typically find a considerable number of able-bodied and skilled tradesmen, tools and working vehicles that can assist in rescue and recovery work. In senior parks we have retired people with a broad range of training and skills to call upon an emergency, as well as a high proportion of people likely to be home whenever an incident occurs.

Before we get into some of the specifics about building a Contingency Plan, let's look at some of the factors that make having a plan so important. One way to look at it (albeit a simplistic one) is through the "Three T's" approach:

Time: In an emergency, time is our biggest enemy. Every minute that goes by without launching an effective rescue operation is likely to put additional lives at stake. Going into an emergency situation without a plan will waste time while people try to organize to respond.

Teamwork: The value of having specific jobs assigned to different people who will be able to work together in a concerted response effort simply cannot be measured and should be obvious.

Training: No plan is a perfect tool simply because emergencies come about in unpredictable ways and catch us off guard, away from the scene or sleeping. But, the more we plan ahead, the better able we are to test our assumptions and

train our team members to respond to the type of incident, the magnitude of the emergency and under varied conditions. Also, the better response we can mount and the more likely we are to improvise effectively in the face of inevitable surprises.

There may be one overriding factor that impacts your park management or even commercial firms or operations adjacent to or near your park. As landlords and caretakers of rental property in specialized circumstances, your owners and management company may have legal (as well as moral) responsibility for planning and training.

If so, interpretations of that responsibility can range from posting or circulating informational literature to assuming leadership in preparing a park contingency plan. The bottom line is that whoever takes responsibility for preparing a plan, there may be funding help available through park ownership, local business and even government.

Of particular value is the Community Emergency Response Team (C.E.R.T.) training that is co-sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and local governments. Some police and fire departments offer programs, usually at no cost to participants. The Red Cross also has a number of offerings, but most of their programs and products carry a price tag.

More Than One Way To Build A Plan

There's no one right way to build a contingency plan. A good plan is one that addresses your specific community needs and is simple enough for people to understand and follow. And, while most plans get modified by events in an emergency, the single greatest value of a plan is in the process of creating it. And the best hope for survival is the education of the community in the act of researching the information necessary to create even a rudimentary plan.

It's when you begin assembling the data, asking the questions and researching your neighborhood that the vague impressions of what it would be like in an emergency come into sharper focus. Now it becomes clear what kind of emergency food, water and clothing should be stored. Knowing what things to do first in an emergency, how to do them and who should take responsibility for them becomes the basic key to survival.

Where To Begin

At first, you're really collecting a lot of raw data at random. Using file folders to keep things separated is a good idea. Here is a suggested approach that will help keep it organized.

Define your territory: Start with a map of the park that shows where homes and common areas are located as well as entry and exit points. Determine what exterior structures will be likely to impact the park and where emergency entrance-exit points (if any) could be improvised if the main entrance/s become blocked.

Assess your risks: Fire is always a major consideration. Earthquakes, plane crashes or train wrecks are all factors that will vary by location. If you're located in an area that is relatively safe from earthquakes, but on the edge of a densely foliated area with high fire danger, you have different priorities than a park

bordered by mainline train tracks or in the flight path of a local airport. Do you have children or pets, aged or physically impaired residents?

Identify your assets: How close are you to fire and police stations? What kind of businesses (if any) are close by? What is the status of the water supply in the park? How many residents are able-bodied and likely to be available in an emergency? Are there a lot of retirees? How many people with first aid or medical experience? How about people skilled in trades? Tools? Working vehicles (trucks, vans, etc.)? Motorhomes (with AC electrical supply generators)? As above, we're only dealing in estimates at this stage.

Determine your mission: Saving lives and preserving property are usually at the heart of an Emergency Response Team mission. But how do people make decisions about whose life to save first? Someone who is so badly injured that they aren't likely to survive anyway? What about animals? Will your team worry about them before accounting for children or elderly residents? What are your priorities? How will you make decisions?

A well-thought-out organizational mission helps all participants better understand what their responsibilities are. But try to keep it simple. As you build your plan you will find that each of your teams will have their own mission and operating instructions.

Divide your park into zones: Based on the number of residents and the park layout, divide the park into "zones" or divisions. Determine what kind of teams you require and how many people you need will depend on the park size and configuration. Each zone should contain no more than 50-60 homes. And, depending on your team members' physical condition, you probably want to have on "block captain" for every 10-20 homes.

Build an organization chart: Having a table of organization is critical to a functional plan. Somebody has to be in charge of each of the critical activities. The best way to build your chart is to draw it with empty boxes first and fill in names as you get volunteers and build your plan.

This will not happen overnight. It will take time to identify people with the skills you needed and your first six or eight volunteers are the hardest to get. People will find it easier to join as they see more of their friends and neighbors getting involved.

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Part 3: Staffing Your Mobile Home Emergency Response Team

As we pointed out in the first two articles in this series, police, fire and medical facilities are likely to be overwhelmed for the first hours and days of a major disaster that affects our community. How well we (and our neighbors) are prepared and trained to respond in a major event may well determine our odds for survival.

Last time we focused on gathering information from people about their needs, their skills and their resources (as well as those in the community) in order to build an effective plan and community team. This time, assuming we have made significant progress on our survey of the community, we will turn our attention to how the various individual teams might be organized.

Structure Your Teams To Fit Your Community

There are different ways to approach this organization. And the way we present it here is for purposes of illustration only. The particular makeup of your community may require more focus on one or more of the special teams than would be appropriate in another community.

If, for example, your park is located in or near a high crime area, your Security Team might be configured quite differently (and designated to be activated earlier in an emergency scenario) than one in a park that is located in an affluent or upper-middle-class residential area. Likewise, if your park is adjacent to a railroad line, you might want to pay special attention to your Search & Rescue, First Aid & Triage Team strengths and training.

First Check With Your City About C.E.R.T. Training

Above all, we want to stress that you should check with your city to see if you have access to the Community Emergency Response Team (C.E.R.T.) training. It is sponsored jointly by your City or County Police & Fire Departments and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). If you do, you should have as many of your fellow volunteers go through this training as possible.

It's usually free or very low cost and is one of the best ways we know of to build a well-prepared Community Emergency Response Team. At the very least, you should request copies of the C.E.R.T. Participant Handbook (SM - 317, May 1994) from FEMA. We'll include instructions on how to request other resources to help you later in the series.

How Many Teams Do You Need?

The larger your park, the more volunteers you will need, but the more people you will have available to help in an emergency. In addition to a Division Team for each Zone (50-60 homes in each) you have designated, you will probably

want the following Teams to be available to help wherever in the park they are needed:

Group One

Fire, Search & Rescue
Triage & First Aid

Group Two

Damage Report & Control
Care & Shelter (Including Child Center & Pet Care units)

Group Three

Park Security
Auxiliary Power
Transportation

Note: Smaller parks will probably consolidate their Teams by Groups. Larger parks, on the other hand, may find it necessary to have more than one Triage & First Aid Team for example.

Your Division Teams Are The Foundation of Your Operation

Whatever happens, your Division Teams will be the first on any emergency scene. Their discipline and training will make the biggest difference in the number of lives saved and property protected. If your park has 500 homes, you will probably want to have seven to 10 Division Teams, depending on the physical layout. If you only have 250 homes, you probably will only need four to six Divisions.

In addition to a Division Commander in each Zone, you will want to have Block Captains whose responsibility is to look after specific groups of residences (10-15 each) and ideally, one person on your home teams from each of the major special teams...but, that may not be possible.

Start With Command & Control

At the center of your structure should be the Command & Control Team. Here is where the Incident Commander sets up a functioning headquarters and directs the various teams and team members to points where they are needed most urgently. A lot of information is processed here and split-second decisions have to be made continuously.

Each decision you make to respond to a specific need impacts the future decisions you will make because you are assigning people and resources that won't be available to you until they complete a specific assignment. In a real emergency, you will have to make decisions that impact who dies and who may live.

You need to have significant discipline and training to allow yourself to make the really tough calls. It actually takes a whole team to make the Command & Control function work smoothly. Choosing your Incident Commander and Assistant Incident Commander are critical decisions. But, in reality, everyone on

the Command & Control Team needs to be prepared to fill that role in and emergency because you don't know who will be available and first on the scene.

Fire, Search & Rescue Team

Fighting fires in mobile homes can be especially dangerous. It usually involves preventive measures to keep a fire from spreading. Likewise, Search & Rescue must be approached carefully. All too often, rescuers become part of the problem, despite their good intentions. Even professional firefighters approach rescues cautiously.

There are proven techniques to safely performing search & rescue operations. These Team Members must know how to instruct and direct others to help them perform their mission.

Triage & First Aid Team

In "Triage" we learn to first treat only those injuries that are quick and easy. People who are near death or require major medical help are attended to only after we've assessed all victims and mobilized those that are able to care for themselves and possibly help with others.

The reason for this may appear illogical at first, but realize that by treating the most minor injuries first, we are doing the most good for the greatest number of people. And, we spare ourselves the trauma of dealing with more patients later.

(If we spend a lot of time treating a critically injured person, while three others whose minor injuries become major problems, we are losing ground and missing out on possible help we could have gotten from those with minor injuries who we make mobile to help us.)

Where Triage is really the "assessment" process, we prefer to get injured people to a central location as soon as possible where their injuries can be looked after in a more thorough and consistent manner.

Damage Assessment & Control

Determining how serious a home is damaged is an important step in deciding if it is safe for residents to remain inside. It's also important to assess the danger a damaged home presents to adjacent structures. Mobile homes that have earthquake bracing are significantly more stable than those resting simply on piers or concrete blocks.

In addition to the danger of fire, homes can be jolted off their piers (which can punch through floorboards and even impale residents). But more often, homes are destabilized only enough to trap residents when doors won't open due to bent or twisted structural elements, fallen bookcases or appliances, etc.

Having professional builders or other trades people on the Damage Control Team is especially helpful. Their experience and trained eyes can identify problems quickly to make the determinations that are necessary in an emergency.

Care & Shelter Teams

The challenge to mobile home parks in a severe emergency is complex. In “senior parks” we have larger numbers of aged residents with medicinal needs, mobility challenges and a number of related problems. But, we also are more likely to have a greater pool of retired people who have significant business or trade skills and more of them are likely to be home during the day.

In “family parks” there are more likely to be greater numbers of able-bodied residents to respond to an emergency, but not during the business day. Also, the presence of more children presents a special challenge. In both parks, pets can present a special problem. The Care & Shelter Teams need to be formed in a configuration that matches the circumstances of the individual park.

There is a natural tendency for residents to gravitate to the office or community center area in an emergency. This is usually very detrimental to emergency operations and can even be more dangerous than remaining near their homes. We recommend setting up teams in each division or park zone where designated residents serve as Care & Shelter Areas (some for children, some for pets and some for aged residents with medicinal or life support needs).

Park Security Team/s

Most people think of “park security” as protecting residents from vandalism or keeping order. But, this is really a minor activity for most parks that isn’t needed, at least in the early stages of an emergency. Chances are good that these services will be available from local authorities by time the need arises.

More important are the issues of danger to park safety from disrupted utilities (gas, water & electricity) or adjacent industries, etc. Park Security Teams to work with the Damage Assessment & Control Teams to cordon off dangerous areas, move RV’s into position to supply auxiliary power, direct foot & vehicular traffic and even arrange for evacuation where appropriate are all far more likely tasks for this group.

How you configure these volunteers into emergency response teams depends on the size, layout, location and type of park you live in. Having residents with a broad range of skills and the ability to serve on more than one team is important. You never know precisely what skills are going to be needed in an emergency or who will be available to provide them. Flexibility and the ability to improvise will be the true measure of your park’s Contingency Plan.

Communication Is A Critical Component of a Contingency Plan.

How you direct activities at a distance, between zones and between teams is problematic and requires considerable attention. It can be accomplished very cost-effectively using inexpensive GMRS and/or FRS radios. But, how you set up and test your system deserves special attention. This, and a sample Contingency Plan Outline, will be our next topic.

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Part 4: The Communications Plan

In this article, we will address the importance of communications, and how to structure your park's Contingency Plan. In both cases, simplicity is the key to success. The more elaborate you make your Plan, the less likely it will work in whatever kind of emergency you find yourself in. You don't really want to train people to act the same way in all situations. You want them trained in how to react to various emergency situations that might arise.

Your Plan Should Train People To React To Emergencies

Disasters are not planned events. We can only guess at how or when they may come about and what the consequences will be. It's best to keep it simple and flexible to let your park's Emergency Response Team adapt to the circumstances. But, before we get into structuring your Plan, let's address one of the most critical elements of responding to a disaster: communications.

It's a foregone conclusion that a major emergency will result in a loss of power, at least for some period. That probably includes your telephone service, including cellular and pay phones. It's during those early minutes, hours and even days that communications are likely to make the difference between life and death for some and the preservation of property for many others. Like the overall plan. Your communications planning should be kept as simple as possible.

Park Size Determines Communications Needed

The size and layout of your park and its relationship with the community will determine much of your needs. A small park might well get by with a few bullhorns. A large park, with several hundred homes, will require some sort of walkie-talkie system and operator protocol to control who is reporting what to whom and what the reporting priorities are. Just learning how to use any radio properly can be a daunting experience for some. Training and practice sessions become an important part of the planning.

If your city is well prepared, you will probably have Amateur Radio Operators working with the local authorities to provide emergency communications. This helps them keep in touch with the outside world. You need to know how to get in touch with them in an emergency. But, that doesn't solve the problem of inter-park communications.

Having Citizens Band Radio capability is also useful in communicating with the outside world. Authorities as well as citizens monitor these frequencies, especially Channel 9 for emergencies. It's also a way to learn about local conditions from truckers and other private users. But, this is not really practical for use in a small geographic area as the range is likely to be too great and your transmissions (as well as reception) will not be confined to the park.

Walkie-Talkies Are an Inexpensive Solution

Every-one on your team should have a hand-held radio. These are available in two basic versions for citizen use. The Family Radio Service (FRS) band has 14 basic channels and a range of up to 2 miles. This requires no license to operate.

The General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) units have up to a five-mile radius, but require FCC licensing. (A simple application process.) These units typically have 15 channels and share the first seven channels with the FRS Channels 1-7.

A small park, say less than 300 homes, can easily get by with the FRS units, which sell for \$25-\$45 each. The GMRS units start at \$45 each and usually come in pairs. Larger parks would do well to consider using a combination of the GMRS and FRS radios.

They might use the GMRS frequencies 8-15 for their designated Emergency Strike Teams that respond throughout the park and the channels 1-7 that appear on both, confining the less expensive FRS units to their Region or Division Teams, Block Captains, etc.

Both of these units are available at stores like Target, Radio Shack and Costco. The selection is particularly good around the holidays and the prices come down after Christmas!

Tiered Communications Are Required: Your Communications Plan is really a two-tiered system. You want your Block Captains to be able to communicate with each other in their own Section or Division with their Division Commander. Each Section (or neighborhood) should have its own Channel. This is where the majority action will take place in the early stages of an event.

Different Channels Serve Specific Functions

Next, you need a Command Post with frequencies that allow the Incident Commander to communicate with each Division Commander as well as with the Special Teams that serve as a Strike Force and respond to needs in different neighborhoods.

Assigning these frequencies requires some careful planning after thinking through various scenarios. There's no one right way for all communities.

Structuring The Plan: So how do you structure a Contingency Plan for your Emergency Response Team? Well, once again, the bigger your park, the more complex your Plan needs to be. Your Plan has to reflect your park and its situation.

Where a small park in a rural location may have only one serious potential threat, such as an earthquake or flood, a larger park situated near busy railroad tracks and/or industrial locations (that could be the target of a terrorist attack) will have a more complex plan.

Here's an outline that should help you get started:

Plan Outline: Overview – A description of your park, the situation, etc. Policies and responsibilities.

Threat Analysis: What is your most likely disaster scenario? Are you in a major fault zone? Near railroad or chemical plants? What about floods? What is

most likely to occur that would cause you to mobilize your Emergency Response Team?

Activation Level: At what points (Richter Scale, local alarms, etc.) do you activate your Command & Control. When do you alert the Division Leaders and Block Captains?

Team Descriptions: What are the various Divisions comprised of (which homes)? How are the Special Teams designated (Fire & Rescue, First Aid & Triage, Damage Control, Security, etc.)

Procedures: What are the missions of each Team and what procedures do they follow in carrying out that mission?

Communications Procedures: What is the radio protocol and sequence of implementation? (Who talks to whom and what is the procedure?)

Resources: What kind of experience and skills do residents have? What kind of supplies do you have on hand? Where are tools located? Etc.

This is admittedly overly simplistic. But it's a place to start. As you build your Team, you'll be building your Plan as well. The more people on your Team can contribute to building it, the more likely they will be able to follow the Contingency Plan in an emergency. The best way to know when your Plan is coming together is when your training sessions go smoothly. Without training, even the best plan will be useless.

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Part 5: Preparation Is The Key To Survive

This is the last article in our series. It's appropriate to wind up our discourse with a review of the most important points. Before we touch on the specifics, we want to point out, once again, that no emergency plan is perfect or even complete. In fact, you will be lucky if half of your organization and operational strategy work anything like you envision it...at least in the early aftermath of an emergency. Why is that?

We never really know how or when a disaster will strike. If we did, we would be better able to prevent it. So all the planning and organizing we do is based on assumptions and guesswork. In a truly major disaster, we don't know who will be home at the time, who may not survive it and which team members, for one reason or another, simply aren't able to perform their assigned roles.

The Best Plan is Both Simple and Flexible

But the planning and the training that follows it provide a track for the team to run on and a basis for improvising when the time comes. Therefore, even the most complete and well-thought-out plan is only a framework that brings people together who are committed to their community and to each other. It becomes the platform for the single most important and beneficial aspect of good planning - education!

The more every person in the community knows about preparing for (and responding to) a disaster, the greater the likelihood of greater survival. And, the better prepared each household is, the less strain there will be on the community to assist them.

Even the strongest team is dependent on the ability of each of its members and their households to first be survivors before they can be counted on to come to the aid of others in the community. Education and individual household preparation on the part of everyone in the park should therefore be your first goal.

Know Your Park: Your People and Your Local Situation: Next in line is knowledge of the park. Knowing who has special needs (infirmity, limited mobility, etc.) is just as important as knowing who has special skills, tools and resources. Conducting surveys of your park residents, the local environment, conducting threat assessments, potential dangers in the area, etc. all adds to the information necessary to build your team and your plan. (How to do assessments was covered in the July and August issues of The Californian.)

Divide Your Park Into Areas or "Divisions.": Identifying your resources and enrolling your neighbors in the program and its importance to the community is an important factor in the success of your plan. Dividing up the park into divisions

and assigning people to areas of responsibility helps guide them in the case of a real emergency.

And, depending on the layout of your park, you can further sub-divide each division into street or block groups and assign “Block Captains” to an appropriate number of homes...usually between 15 and 25, again depending on the way the neighborhood is configured.

Develop Your “Teams”: Develop special teams to respond to different needs in the community. The typical teams include Light Search & Rescue, First Aid & Triage, Structure Reporting & Damage Control, Care & Shelter, Park Security & Transportation, etc. The smaller the park, the more likely it is that some people will serve on more than one team, depending on where they’re needed the most at any particular time.

Try to match the team members to responsibilities that (as closely as possible) correspond to their experience, skills and interests. Also, try to have members of each team living in different areas of the community. The dispersion is valuable for a number of reasons. First, in an emergency, everyone’s first responsibility is for their own safety and their own family. Next, their own neighborhood will present a high priority.

Don’t Be Concerned About Over-Staffing: You simply can’t have too many people on your team/s. As we’ve said before, major emergencies and disasters aren’t predictable. In all likelihood, at least 10-25percent of your team/s will be away from the park when an event occurs. Having extra people as “Reserves” can make all the difference.

And, while it’s a difficult issue to deal with, the fact of the matter is that a real catastrophe will strike unevenly and some areas of your park are likely to receive more damage - even experience more injuries and deaths — than will others. The more dispersed your team members are, the more likely you will be able to field a complete team to respond to the emergency.

Suggestion: Combine your Community Response Team recruiting with membership solicitation in your local GSMOL Chapter. It just makes sense to combine these two very important ways of working together with your neighbors to benefit the entire community.

Training is an Indispensable Component of Building a Successful Plan

Just as your neighbors come and go, the nature of the threats you face in your neighborhood can change with time. Devise a number of scenarios to fit probable threats.

When your plan is documented and your team is formed, “testing” the scenarios you’ve devised is an ongoing process. When your team members can follow the plan, form up at designated locations and run through prescribed exercises, you’re well on your way to having a good plan. Regular training is critical to the success of the plan. People will do “instinctively” what they’ve trained to do.

Communications is the Keystone of a Plan That Works

You will quickly learn that no plan is even remotely useful if you don't have effective communication between the Incident Commander and the various Block Captains and Special Teams you've created.

Where a small mobile home community (say 100 or so homes) might get by without radios or even bullhorns, larger parks will require some sort of walkie-talkie type radios. (See the October issue of *The Californian*.) And, here again, practice and training will make all the difference in the success of your plan.

Learning how to use two-way radios can be challenging. You'll want to have a simple protocol that everybody understands. Frequent practice drills are an absolute must for good team performance.

Contact Your City Hall For Help In Building Your Plan

Where do you go to get current information from the agencies and organizations that specialize in Community Emergency Response Team training, information and materials? The best place to start is your city and county government.

The Federal government and the State of California are making information and funds available to cities to encourage them to train citizens in Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) skills. If you or any of your neighbors have the opportunity to attend any of the CERT Training programs run by your city, by all means take advantage of it.

Regardless of whether or not your city is already participating in this program, you can request that they furnish you with training materials supplied through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Keep Us Informed. Let Us Know How We Can Help: We are interested in your experiences and want to help you find the resources you need to build your plan and your team. And, as we learn more about how different parks are progressing in their CERT Programs, we'll share their successes and challenges in articles from time to time.

The Basic Emergency Supply Checklist

In an earthquake or major catastrophe, we may be left to our own devices to survive for several days, even a week or more. Our electricity may be off and we could be without water (that includes the fire hydrants and clubhouse) or natural gas. Here are some of the things you'll want to have on hand and readily accessible in case of a disaster

Water for Drinking and Sanitary Purposes — At least a few Gallons (4 qts./day per person minimum and 1 or 2 /day per pet) Stored in plastic containers and "rotated" to keep fresh.

Tip: Use old plastic milk cartons and tap water for minimum expense. Rotate regularly to keep fresh, store in cool, dark place and add 1/2 teaspoon of household bleach (chlorine) every 2 weeks if not rotated sooner.

Tip: Two sources of water in an emergency are your hot water heater (have you drained it lately to eliminate sediment?) and your toilet tanks (not a good idea if you haven't cleaned them or if you use the dissolving toilet bowl cleaners).

First Aid Kit — This should be freshly stocked and supplies rotated at least yearly.

Food — Canned or dried foods that don't require cooking are best. Keep enough on hand to feed yourself (and any pets) for at least a week to ten days. It may be that long before outside help can reach us in a severe situation.

Tip: Buy mostly only the foods you normally eat and rotate the supply. This not only keeps it fresh, it assures you will be maintaining much the same diet (albeit less conveniently) in the aftermath of an emergency situation. Don't forget things like mechanical can opener, paper plates, plastic cups and eating utensils for maximum flexibility.

Tip: For the gourmet cook types, a camping stove with propane tanks will make life more bearable" but, don't fire them up until the park's gas supply has been deemed safe or turned off and your home is free of natural gas "pockets" that could cause a fire. And don't "barbecue" inside" the fumes are toxic in a closed area!

Clothing — One, two or three sets of warm, comfortable clothing, underwear and rain gear are a must. Glasses or contacts and the associated cases, fluids and paraphernalia should be included.

Medications — Don't let your supply dwindle. Keep at least a week's supply on hand at all times. Always keep a record of your prescriptions in case your normal pharmacy isn't available.

Sanitation — Plastic garbage bags, including small, compactor-strength ones that fit in the toilet bowl are an absolute must. And, since the debris boxes may not get emptied for a while, having a large plastic trash can will be helpful. Household bleach, Lysol, toilet paper, paper towels, etc. may make your life a lot easier through a crisis.

Miscellaneous — Have a personal disaster plan that includes the fastest ways to get out of your house in an emergency. If you have a car, make sure it has been serviced recently with the fan belts and hoses in good shape and never let the gas tank get below half full. (The trunk of your car is a good place to keep your extra clothing and other select items.) Keep a list of relatives and their phone numbers with your emergency supplies along with some cash in small bills. It's also a good idea to pay your bills as promptly as you can to avoid service disruptions or credit problems if the mails are disrupted for a lengthy period. There's a lot more of course. But this list is a good place to start.